

Get the Facts: Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies in people is caused by mites that dig under the skin where it then lives and lays its eggs. A person may not have any signs or symptoms of scabies, but can still spread these itch mites to other people. People get scabies from other people; not from animals.

How do you get scabies?

By direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has the mite. Contact must be prolonged – a quick handshake or hug will not usually spread the mite. The mite is easily spread to sexual partners and household members. It may also occur by sharing clothing, towels and bedding.

How long does it take before symptoms appear?

Symptoms, primarily itching, appear approximately **four weeks** from the time of contact with a person who had the mites.

How long are you infectious?

A person with scabies can give the mite to others as long as they have not been treated with medicine from a doctor for scabies. Mites and eggs are destroyed by treatment, ordinarily after 1 or occasionally, 2 courses of treatment, a week apart. Pieces of clothing and bedding which have been recently used by a person with scabies are considered infectious until treated. Once away from the body, mites do not survive more than 48-72 hours.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common signs and symptoms of scabies are intense itching, especially at night, and a pimple-like itchy rash. The itching and rash each may affect much of the body or be limited to common sites such as the wrist, elbow, armpit, webbing between the fingers, nipple, penis, waist, belt-line, and buttocks. The rash may also include tiny blisters and scales. Scratching the rash can cause skin sores; sometimes these sores become infected by bacteria.

Tiny burrows sometimes are seen on the skin; these are caused by the female scabies mite tunneling just beneath the surface of the skin. These burrows appear as tiny raised and crooked, grayish-white or skin-colored lines on the skin surface. Because mites are often few in number (only 10-15 mites per person), these burrows may be difficult to find. They are most often found in the webbing between the fingers, in the skin folds on the wrist, elbow or knee, and on the penis, breast or shoulder blades.

The head, face, neck, palms and soles often are involved in infants and very young children, but usually not adults and older children

How is scabies diagnosed?

Diagnosis of scabies is usually made based upon the type of rash and the presence of burrows. Whenever possible, **particularly in outbreak situations, the diagnosis of scabies should be confirmed by identifying the mite or mite eggs or fecal matter. Your doctor can do this by carefully removing the mite from the end of its burrow using the tip of a needle or by obtaining a skin scraping to examine under a microscope for mites, eggs or mite fecal matter.** However, a person can still have the mite on their body even if mites, eggs or fecal matter cannot be found by a doctor.

How is scabies treated?

It is important to remember that the first time a person gets scabies they usually have no symptoms during the first two to six weeks they are infested; however they can still spread scabies during this time.

In addition to the person who has symptoms of scabies, treatment is also recommended for household members and sexual contacts, particularly those who have had prolonged direct skin-to-skin contact with the person with scabies. Household members and sexual contacts who have had direct prolonged skin-to-skin contact with a person with scabies within the preceding month should be examined and treated, even if they do not have symptoms. All persons should be treated at the same time to prevent people from getting the mite again.

Medicine to treat scabies is available only with a doctor's prescription and comes in a lotion or cream form. The instructions contained in the box or printed on the label always should be followed carefully. Always contact a doctor or pharmacist if unsure how to use a particular medicine.

The lotion or cream should be applied to all areas of the body from the neck down to the feet and toes. In addition, when treating infants and young children, the lotion or cream also should be applied to their entire head and neck because scabies can affect their face, scalp, and neck, as well as the rest of their body. The lotion or cream should be applied to a clean body and left on for the recommended time before washing it off. Clean clothing should be worn after treatment.

Bedding, clothing and towels used by persons with the mite or their household, sexual and close contacts anytime during the three days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer, by dry-cleaning, or by sealing in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours. Scabies mites generally do not survive more than two to three days away from human skin.

Because the symptoms of scabies are due to the body's reaction to the mites and their feces, itching still may continue for several weeks after treatment even if all the mites and eggs are killed. If itching still is present more than two to four weeks after treatment or if new burrows or pimple-like rash lesions continue to appear, another treatment may be necessary.

Skin sores that become infected should be treated with an appropriate antibiotic prescribed by a doctor.

Insect sprays and insect bombs do not work to get rid of the mite inside a building and are not recommended.

For more information: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/>

